



Boosting healthy lives – Restricting harmful marketing

August 2024

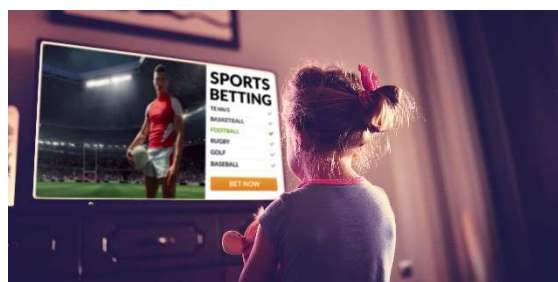
Theologian Kathryn Tanner, in her book *'The Politics of God'* (1992), pointed out that all people are valuable to God. As a result of being valuable to God, all people should have a right to minimum well-being standards. In his work *'A Public Faith. How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good'* (2011), theologian Miroslav Wolf made the case that if we believe God is love and we are created for love, we will care for our neighbours' well-being for their own sake. He stated (p.71):

Our concern will then be not just to lead life well ourselves. Instead, we will strive for life to go well for our neighbours and for them to lead their lives well, and we will acknowledge that their flourishing is tied deeply to our flourishing.

We should be able to enjoy safe and healthy environments that support our wellbeing. Currently, businesses selling products that are harmful to our health continue to profit from the vulnerability of people by using a flood of marketing to tell us to eat more of their products, drink more alcohol and gamble so their profits will increase. Instead, the aggressive marketing of these products means we experience more cancer, heart disease, liver disease, mental ill health and financial hardship. The vast amount of online marketing of harmful products normalises them and makes them more acceptable. Everyone would benefit from less marketing of unhealthy foods, gambling and alcohol.

Targeting Children

Gambling companies advertise during times when children are watching sports, alcohol corporations advertise on kids routes to school, and unhealthy food companies target kids with advertisements as they scroll social media. As a result, our children and grandchildren are growing up having their minds flooded with imagery and messages about these products that are deeply unhealthy.



Research conducted by Deakin University found that children as young as eight-years old were being bombarded with ads for unhealthy foods – including when they search for scooter tricks on social media and play online games. On average, children aged eight to 13 years old were targeted with approximately 13 unhealthy food ads on a typical day they spend online. Teenagers aged 14 to 17 years old see an average of one gambling ad, six alcohol ads and 24 unhealthy food ads every day.

Many ads targeted at children and young people were interactive. For example, ads prompted them to install a gambling program, to learn more about alcoholic drinks, and to order immediately for confectionary and unhealthy takeaway foods – directing children to platforms where these products are sold.

Alcohol corporations have been able to exploit a loophole to advertise during children's television programs. Alcohol advertising is banned on free-to-air television during children-friendly viewing times between 6 am and 8:30 pm. However, the ban does not cover free-to-air broadcasting on apps or smart televisions. So beer ads have been broadcast during *the Wiggles* and Johnny Walker whiskey during *Lego Masters*. Exposing children to alcohol advertising results in them starting to drink earlier and makes it more likely they will drink to harmful levels when they do start drinking.



Using personal data to target the vulnerable

These corporations collect and use the personal data of people most at risk of harm to tailor and target their advertising to these people, enticing them to buy more. They target people in all corners of the online world. They send personalised emails promoting products the person targeted is most likely to buy, social media ads at the times when people are most likely to give into temptations and banner ads on their favourite websites acting as a constant reminder of these harmful products the person would rather avoid. Targeted marketing is an exploitative practice, as it makes it very hard for people trying to cut back on addictive products like alcohol, unhealthy food and gambling to escape the clutches of these companies. People trying to reduce their consumption of these harmful products have reported that they are unable to avoid the advertising of these products when online, even when they have “opted-out” of seeing the advertising.

It does not have to be this way



The Australian Government can act now to put the health and wellbeing of our community before commercial profits by shielding our community from the onslaught of marketing by harmful industries.

The Australian Government is now lagging behind leading governments in other parts of the world in protecting us from exploitative marketing by corporations peddling harmful products. The

governments of Italy and Spain have banned gambling advertising. The governments of Norway and Lithuania have comprehensive restrictions on alcohol marketing. The governments of Argentina and Chile have banned advertising of unhealthy food to children.

What You Can Do

Write polite and respectful letters to:

The Hon. Mark Butler MP

Minister for Health and Aged Care
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra, ACT, 2600

Salutation: Dear Minister

The Hon. Michelle Rowland MP

Minister for Communications
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra, ACT, 2600

Salutation: Dear Minister

Points to make in your letter:

- Express deep concern at the harm corporations pushing unhealthy food, gambling and alcohol are doing to public health due to a lack of restriction over their exploitative marketing practices.
- Request that the Government introduce a *Harmful Products Marketing Act* to further regulate the way unhealthy food, gambling and alcohol corporations are able to promote their products and to prevent them from marketing their products to children.
- Ask that the new law be modelled on the successful *Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Act 1992*, which since its introduction three decades ago, has made a significant contribution to the reduction in harms from tobacco use in Australia which has saved many lives.